

IT MUST BE a rather sheepish—almost apologetic—Wycombe Wanderers who look down on their rivals from a perch at the top of the Isthmian League at this moment. With pre-weekend leaders on goal average, Oxford City, going astray 3-1 at Maidstone, the Blues sneaked one point clear of the field on Saturday . . . but oh, what a diabolical shambles they made of their afternoon of glory!

That John Maskell had to make not one solitary save in 90 minutes is ample indication of the kind of opposition Ilford were.

But perhaps the very nature of Wycombe's victory goals — one bundled in by a wandering full back, the other tinged with a blatant suspicion of off-side — best sum up the "dud", witnessed by a sizeable Loakes Park gallery.

Wanderers made things infinitely more difficult than they needed to be. Their passing was inaccurate, their football lacadaisical, and the wastage well nigh criminal.

And all this against a side impotent up front, suspect in defence and crippled in mid-field from first to final whistle.

Ilford's troubles began with the non-arrival of their central powerhouse, Penrhyn. They persisted with an eighth minute leg injury to the missing man's regular partner, Ellis, who spent the rest of the period limping as a passenger in attack.

So, when Penrhyn eventually turned up and took the field (as second half substitute) it was in place of his link-line colleague. Thus, not surprisingly, Ilford always generated minimum effect from mid-field.

There was little to prevent a Wanderers' field day except Wanderers themselves. Once near the Ilford goal, as they so often were, the whole system disintegrated.

Captain John Delaney momentarily broke the spell in the 25th minute, when 'keeper Powell rose to take a probing Worley free kick, and fell into the net while in possession following the centre-half's challenge. Referee Mr. Ball (Winchester) however, judged Delaney to have "pushed" rather than "shouldered", and ruled "no goal".

Ten minutes later Ilford's charmed life reached a peak as Guihenn blocked a Barry Baker volley on the line, two more shots were cleared split seconds later, and the defenders breathed again with Horseman banging loosely, straight across the goalface.

A long floater from Ian Rundle hovered goalwards after 40 minutes, but Powell stretched high to palm it away. And before the interval both Samuels and Ward belted their shots high over the bar.

The resumption seemed to change nothing, and it might perhaps have been timely to introduce substitute Viv Busby to proceedings.

Within two minutes, Samuels directed an overhead kick just wide across the goalmouth.

Yet, at last, after 54 minutes of almost embarrassing toil, Len Worley flighted a corner off the left, for Ian Rundle to re-direct the ball over the line.

Mr. Ball was chased half the pitch length by two unhappy Ilford backs, and their goal-keeper, but the score stood, and Wanderers, for all their sins, were safe.

Horseman (three times), Worley and, to make up for a pair of poor first half passes on his recall in place of holidaying Charlie Gale, even left-back Lou Temel tested Powell.

And, not before time, some far superior football began to emerge in the last quarter.

Wanderers' second, scored 10 minutes from the end, was however smoothly manoeuvred, but highly suspect. Bobby Hatt, easily recognisable by his bandaged hand, split Ilford in two with a penetrating through ball, which Keith Samuels took, raced on and slipped past the advancing goalie. Whether "Sammy's" positioning was legally valid or not . . .

Wycombe: J. Maskell; I. Rundle, L. Temel; J. Lalley, J. Delaney, K. Ward; L. Worley, B. Baker, A. Horseman, R. Hatt, K. Samuels, Sub: V. Busby (not used).
Ilford: G. Powell; D. Griffin, P. Dodkins; C. Ellis (sub: N. Penrhyn), G. Lillington, F. Guihenn; Clark, F. Ward, F. Sharp, F. Whitehead, A. Smith.